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ABSTRACT

Organizational literature has long acknowledged the contextual relationship of specialization, referent group orientation, and vertical mobility as important sociological variables. In this article, the structural implications of a transformation in the educational vertical mobility concept due to alterations in functional specialization and referent group orientation is discussed. In turn, four specific propositions are derived from these implications. First, vertical mobility is not exclusively equated with adopting an institutionally specified administrative specialization. Second, primary referent group orientation is not necessarily correlated with expectations of inclusion in the administrative hierarchy. Third, social comparisons of success do not always refer to identification of institutionally determined administrative potential. And fourth, functional specialization for original admittance into the organization is becoming a dominant expectation for politically viable advancement and successful career patterns. (Author/JG)

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Functional Specialization, Referent Group Orientation and Vertical Mobility in the Educational Organization

In this article, functional specialization and reference group orientation are examined in light of their relationship to the concept of vertical mobility in the education organization. Specific examination of the vertical mobility concept is limited in the literature about schools. Most studies acknowledge that the contextual variables (specialization and reference groups) are related to mobility within the organization, but the specific effects upon vertical advancement are not examined in a systematic manner.

Specialization, reference group orientation and mobility were selected as key variables because each plays an important role in sociological, or social-psychological research and organizational theory. Functional specialization has strong roots in the Weberian structuralist approach (Weber 1947, Etzioni 1964); the referent group variable is derived from theoretical formulations on groups and social relations (Homans 1964, Thibaut and Kelly 1959) while upward mobility is related to structural (Weber 1947, Gumpert and Smith 1968), normative (Kelly 1952) and psychological (Deutsch and Krauss 1965) concepts of social comparison. Analysis focuses upon the operational definition of vertical mobility in traditional and emerging educational institutions and the relationship to functional specialization and referent group orientation of organization members.

VARIABLES IN THE LITERATURE

The concept of bureaucracy (Weber 1947) clearly defines the relationship of specialization, work groups and mobility. Recruitment, selection, placement and advancement within the organization are based upon assumptions of

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specialized expertise. Work groups are defined by official duties and hierarchial relationships which fix horizontal and vertical position. Mobility may be multidirectional but vertical advancement and successful career patterns are clearly tied to superior competence in institutional specializations congruent to the organizational goal.

Discussion of the effects of informal structure on Weber's idealized model (Barnard 1938, Blau 1956), and the resulting organizational culture (Katz and Kahn 1966) or "climate" (Halpin 1966) dominate the literature on administrative and organizational theory. Specific discussions of modifications to the specialization, referent group and mobility variables have focused upon the necessity of fulfilling expressive needs (Dalton 1959, Etzioni 1961), guaranteeing compliance (Etzioni 1964), improving modes of communication (Homans 1950), legitimizing the exercise of institutional authority (Blau and Scott 1962, Allison 1971). A growing body of literature has documented the unique ability of the educational bureaucracy (Iannaccone 1967, Wirt and Kirst 1971) to guard against external scrutiny of goal formation, implementation of policy and governance relationships.

To date, little concerning the relationship of vertical mobility, functional specialization and referent group orientation has been presented in operationally testable propositions. This void is especially noticeable in discussions of urban schools. This article, therefore, develops testable propositions using the variables of specialization and referent group orientation relating them to vertical mobility in educational organizations.

THEORY UNDERLYING THE VARIABLES

Specialization is the designation of expertise to accomplish specific tasks in a complex, functionally differentiated organization (Etzioni 1961). The specification of expertise depends upon who stipulates the task to be

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performed at the operational level (Stinchcombe 1959) and the institutional ability to effect compliance (Etzioni 1964, Solomon 1968). Within professional and semi-professional organizations, such as education (Etzioni 1969, Etzioni 1964), expertise is differentiated between administrative and other task functions. In schools, administrative specialization is different from teaching specialization, and the differentiation would seem to increase proportionately with organizational size and complexity (Blau 1970, Meyer 1968).

Members of organizations commonly view individuals as groups or classes of people and label them "reference groups" based upon the ability to set social standards for evaluation of attitudes, abilities or current situations (Jones and Gerard 1967). Social comparison needs of individuals lead to the emergence of cliques (Deutsch and Krauss 1965) and the satisfactory adjustment of interpersonal systems depends upon setting a comparison level (Gumpert and Smith 1968). The extent that referent group comparison levels are congruent with institutional stipulations has been widely discussed in terms of individual morale (Presthus 1962), administrative practice (Blake and Mouton 1964) and as the basis of clique formation (Burns 1955, Tichy 1973).

The literature clearly shows that the concept of vertical in relation to mobility is associated with organizational success or personal advancement based upon criteria that is institutionally determined (Presthus 1962, Gumbert and Smith 1968). Further, referent group formation is dependent upon the type of mobility system which an organization establishes; whether promotion by merit, seniority (Gumbert and Smith 1968) or political enhancement of incompetence (Peter and Hull 1969).

The premise of this article is that the concept of vertical mobility in educational organizations is undergoing a major transformation from traditional

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structural stipulations and normative expectations. Specific propositions about the transformation effect on operational meanings and relationships for specialization and referent group orientation are presented.

Historical Evolution of Schools

Schools began as functionally undifferentiated, normatively congruent organizations without an administrative structure (Stanley 1953, Cremin 1964). The organizational purpose was clear and relatively unsophisticated, usually socialization to religious prescriptions and basic skill training (Merriman 1931). Ten decades ago, the increase of organizational size and complexity of task forced the growth of administrative specialization and structural hierarchy (Schnore 1965). The first administrative specialists were chosen for their mastery of the teaching function and, as such, the new specialization stipulated by the growing structure remained congruent with past functions and normative orientations (Stanley 1953). However, by the turn of this century several drastic modifications of the ideal bureaucratic model were clearly implanted in education. The administrative hierarchical structure had become a separate entity, functionally different from teaching and, as such, in contrast to organization requirements for enterance and past expectations for upward advancement. Further, organizational growth and adaptation to multiple schooling environments had made institutional purposes and goals uncertain (Schnore 1965, Callahan 1962), which, in turn, made relationships and criteria for mobility within the administrative hierarchy unclear (Rogers 1969). By the 1930's Great Depression, successful resistance to big city Reform movements on quasi-sacred rationales (Iannaccone and Wiles 1971) made the schools the most impeneratable of public governmental agencies (Katz 1971, Lowi 1964).

The educational organization which uniformly existed into the 1960's and

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remains today in many places had several unique characteristics (Eliot 1959, Etzioni 1969). Teaching specialization remained a requirement for admission to the organization (Zeigler 1967, Griffiths et. al. 1963), but continued its functional growth in difference from administration. Referent group orientation for bases of comparison became increasingly confused; allegiance to the teaching function guaranteed subordinate organization position and a negative correlation to administration. As administrative specialization had supplanted the original criteria for advancement in the hierarchy (e.g. master teaching) upward mobility was contingent upon a teacher's ability to identify with the administration function (Presthus 1962, Sexton 1969, Zeigler 1967). Structurally, the concept of vertical mobility meant adaptation to the requirements of administrative specialization.

The structural identification of vertical mobility with administration was philosophically rationalized as a logical transformation of Weber's model (Callahan 1962), supported by formal rules and institutional procedures (Allison 1971), reward systems (e.g. pay scales) and organizational norms of personal success (Waller 1932). Psychologically, vertical mobility meant the teacher who wished success and institutional advancement broke referent group orientations tied to reasons for enterance into the organization and primary occupational training (Zeigler 1967). Further, the teacher must conform to hierarchical criteria for successful administrative advancement which emphasized conformity to the status quo and docility (Sexton 1969, Waller 1932).

Since the late 1950's and early 1960's the educational organization has reacted to increased external and internal demands for scrutiny and change (e.g. Sputnik, Civil Rights Movement) which has had direct implications for the structural legitimacy of vertical mobility through administrative specialization. Demands for increased scrutiny of policy functions from outside the

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schools have been argued on rationales of efficiencies or fiscal accountabilities (Levine 1971) and for guarantees of social effectiveness or relevance of purpose (Gittell and Hollander 1969). Internal demands for structural alterations have centered upon challenges from other than administrative members of the organization (e.g. teachers, custodial employees) on one hand and from a disintegration of hierarchical continuity within the administrative function (e.g. central office versus local school authority and power) as the number of student clients and traditional legitimacy of institutional position decreases on the other (Rogers 1969, Bendiner 1971, Wiles and Conley 1974, Perry and Wildman 1970. At present, the concept of vertical mobility in schools is undergoing a transformation of major proportions which is affecting functional specialization and referent group orientation of organizational members.

IMPLICATIONS

The changing nature of educational governance and institutional control has created several interrelated propositions capable of operational testing:

1. "vertical" mobility is not exclusively equated with adopting an institutionally specified administrative specialization.

2. primary referent group orientation is not necessarily correlated with expectations of being included in the administrative hierarchy.

3. Social comparisons of "success" do not refer to identification of institutionally determined administrative potential in all cases.

4. Functional specialization for original admittance into the organization is becoming a dominant expectation for politically viable advancement and success career patterns within the organization.

It may be that the uniqueness of the educational organization has rested in its insulation from externally induced challenge or critical scrutiny which has rivaled the church (Hills 1965, Berger 1963). The key to the present educational transformation has occurred in other governmental agencies (Lowi 1964); a rejection of the structural legitimacy of a single policy hierarchy controlled by administration. The altered concept of vertical mobility is

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directly related to a successful challenge to administrative institutional authority and actual power within the organization. The primary challenge to authority has been the alternation of teacher referent group orientations to maintenance of enterance functional specialization. The redefinition of "professional" teacher which modifies the subordinate institutional role (Etzioni 1969, Perry and Wildman 1970, Rosenthal 1969) has specified certain policy conditions which circumvent or replace administrative authority (Cunningham 1968, Solomon 1969). The primary challenge to traditional administrative power has been the control of data and information through expertise and functional specialization. The central office specialist (Wiles and Williams 1973) or the teacher in the self-contained classroom (Strinchecombe 1959) has countervailing policy resources which directly effect the formation and/or implementation of administrative policy. Growing awareness of the reliance upon specialists has increasingly forced administrators to follow the "law of anticipated reactions" (Friedrich 1958) and tailor policy demands to expected response. Ironically, this is the same relationship traditionally found between the board of education or community and the administrative hierarchy (Kerr 1964).

The transformation of functional specialization and referent group orientation has both structural and psychological implications for the concept of vertical mobility in the schools. Structurally, educational organizations seem to be closer to the Weber ideal of functional specialization as the rationale for organizational selection and advancement. If this tendency toward teacher professionalization continues, administrative specialists may be recruited as such rather than the traditional pattern of coming from teacher ranks. At the same time, the transformation has clarified that the Weberian

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sumption of single organization purpose and resulting specialist classification is negated within the educational organization. Clearly, the organization pursues multiple goals under the abstraction "good of the children" and the resulting specialization creates a distributive policymaking arena (Perry and Wildman 1970, Lowi 1964) oriented toward "broker" leadership (Kaplan 1965).

Psychologically, referent group orientation will continue toward expertise and functional interest rather than seeking allegiance and conformity to the administrative hierarchy. It is important to note that the psychological shift is not due to altered philosophical or normative commitments but the transformation of the political position of the institutionally determined subordinate. As the educational organization follows the evolution of its municipal and economic counterparts decades earlier, it would seem the psychological orientation will continue to develop along the functional specialization in which a person enters the organization. The ultimate result for the transformed organization "climate" is the traditional concept of horizontal specialization to modify the administrative hierarchy as the only basis for vertical mobility. The new perception of advancement should have direct bearing upon policymaking and career expectations of educators in the future.

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